

Infused entertaining: How to incorporate cannabis into dishes and drinks in a smart, safe and delicious way

With edibles on the horizon for legal cannabis retailers, The Globe and Mail convened a group of industry insiders and curious diners for a candid conversation on the new world of entertaining with cannabis

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SPECIAL TO THE GLOBE AND MAIL

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Dessert featuring sesame mousse with tahini, lime and halva.

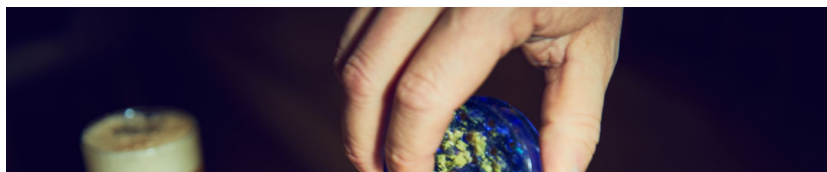
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Sure, cannabis has health benefits and therapeutic properties, but what about its entertaining value?

With the promise of ready-made infused cookies, brownies or candy edibles on the horizon for legal cannabis retailers, The Globe and Mail convened a group of industry insiders and curious diners for a candid conversation on the new world of entertaining with cannabis and invited Craig Harding, executive chef and culinary director at La Palma and Constantine in Toronto, to devise and serve a high-dining menu.

Several around the table have years of industry experience, be it as legacy players now working on the medical or recreational side of the industry, or working in design or cultivation – and all, ahem, are legacy consumers.

“Eating is much easier on the body than smoking is,” Leah Lavergne, maker of HighNoon handcrafted ceramic pipes, says to the group of the slow release, which creates an opportunity for the journey to be more social.





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Infusing the Pineapple Tea Cocktail with Mango Haze.

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Gourmet dining and weed can feel like paradoxical categories and even for the seasoned, a cannabis dinner party seems a very bougie thing to do – especially if one’s preferred consumption format is old-school and basic (as it seems to be for everyone around the table – from amateur to pro). But, as Michael Leach, owner of Dynasty Cannabis, a lifestyle brand extension of his Toronto design shop and tropical plant emporium, points out to us, the runaway success of Dynasty’s elegant streamlined grow kit is proof that the satisfaction of DIY experimenting with something new has plenty of appeal: “People were really jazzed about growing pot for the first time!”

All agree, however, that even with better access to cannabis ingredients, the prospect for a host can seem daunting. The task of calculating the right dosage and accounting for the cumulative delayed effects of a high gives pause to everyone around the table.

The most curious newcomers to cannabis are those from the ages of 45 to 70, who want to get away from pills and conventional drugs, Curtis Wallace, director of cultivation at licensed cannabis producer WeedMD, tells us. From there, concerns swiftly move to questions of metabolism and accurate dosage: “What’s best, how do I use it, how do I roll a joint – that’s one of the most popular questions from that age group,” he says.

Ingrie Williams, lifestyle journalist and co-founder of online beauty magazine the T Zone, agrees with Wallace: On her beat, there are still many consumers who are

confused by this in-between stage where there is both a professional and cottage industry – as is the case in the dining realm.



Infusing the labneh.

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Harding assures us that microdosing each course by calculating how much you'll be consuming from the meal's start to finish before you begin eating is a good way to pace yourself. He emphasizes that it's important for novice hosts to let guests to control the dose. For our meal, Harding prepared light doses of actives for each dish's garnish or optional condiments.

As we sip an aromatic palate-opening green juice-and-THC cocktail even the chef admits that the main challenge for high-minded home cooks will be producing a consistent result and keeping an eye on consumption. In between courses, he affably pops over to offer insight on the dish as well as to remind us to start low and go slow.

Not that decoding the culinary side isn't also a challenge – the movie *Pineapple Express* may be to cannabis what *Sideways* is to wine, but has none of its aesthete tendencies. A focus not just on the effect but also on the culinary journey may seem counterintuitive to the prevailing culture around cannabis, but it could soon be as popular as gourmet food and wine pairings.



“What I think is fascinating as the outsider looking in is right now we’re just spoiled for choice,” Christopher Waters, The Globe’s wine critic, tells the group. “It comes down to enhancement and from a strictly experiential point of view it’s fascinating to see how the flavour compounds interact with other things.”

“The thing you’ll notice when infusing cannabis with food,” Harding adds, whether it’s cannabis in a labneh as our first course or in the creamy “snow” on our dessert, “is that it has a resounding green quality to it – not just what it represents, that it’s a green plant and an herb.” He explains that the cooking experience starts with getting familiar with terpenes – organic compounds that give each plant its distinct aromatic profile. It helps to think of them as you would perfume fragrance families or unusual herbs.

Looking around the table’s decorative bell jars of dried White Shark, Mango Haze and Blueberry Seagal flower from Color Cannabis, Wallace rhymes off some of their profiles. The indica-dominant Blueberry Seagal strain, for example, is redolent with earthy-sweet caryophyllene (think: peppercorns, cloves, cinnamon) terpenes, whereas the sativa-dominant hybrid White Shark features a limonene (rosemary, juniper) and humulene (hops, coriander) terpene mix that registers mostly as sweet citrus.

“One of the best tricks I’ve ever been told,” Lavergne says, explaining a flavour hack, “is that if you have nice weed that has a bunch of terpenes, roll a joint and then without lighting it just pull at it and you can taste a lot of what you’re going to get – without the burnt quality.” From there it’s about decoding and matching complementary flavour profiles, even using favourite cookbooks that aren’t cannabis related. It could be as simple as adapting a trusted recipe – here, Constantine’s signature sesame mousse is dusted with infused “snow” – and figuring out how best to lightly incorporate a psychoactive angle.



Craig Harding adds hybrid CDB/THC oil to the Be Green cocktail.

How much the average host will embrace the skill challenge is just one of the interesting aspects of the ways the niche industry of cannabis entertaining could develop. “So many strains and so much detail is layered onto this business very quickly,” Waters says, gesturing to the pros around the table. “You understand it because you live it, but as a consumer my head would probably explode. And that’s

really fascinating, because the danger I see is that it's so easy to suck the fun out of it – like wine geeks ruined wine for so many people.”

At the meal's halfway point, the infusion switches to CBD, and Williams says what we're all thinking: that maybe the simplest way to cook with cannabis for both curious guests and those who want to limit how much they partake is to offer a doctored menu item – such as olive oil – alongside an unadulterated version, both of which would work beautifully on the homemade brown butter and squash pasta that has just hit the table.

As the meal progresses, there's cross-talk about the struggle to keep up with demand on certain popular strains and about bridging the knowledge gap. By the time the fancy party favours appear – Manzo Haze expertly rolled in 24-carat gold papers – the pleasant buzz around the table has evolved into a loose conversation about black market versus corporatization, consumer uptake and the general state of the industry.



Smoking the Kolapore Springs trout.

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The great reveal of the Kolapore Springs trout.

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Even for these experts, the only consensus on where the largest legal market in the world is headed, even in the short-term, is conjecture.

“It’ll be interesting to see how consumption changes over the next couple of years,” Leach says, “because when California started, 80 per cent of the market was flower and now that number has flipped completely to 80 per cent distillates and edibles. I’m excited for a time when neighbourhood shops will exist, and I think that will help with the conversation about normalization of it as well.”

“There’s a lot of speculation as to whether or not the OCS [Ontario Cannabis Store] is going to be eradicated,” Wallace adds, “and whether or not it’s going to be legacy players directly selling to retailers, and there’s supposed to be a lot of new retail formats.”

Lavergne mentions she’s been hearing rumours of different kinds of cool options that are going to be rolling out – cooking experiences, yoga studios, lounges that are different from the typical head shop.

“I think people are going to have a lot of fun with how cannabis is socialized,” she says. “And what consumption spaces are going to look like,” Leach adds, like whether crossover for alcohol and cannabis spaces will be permitted, and make private dinner parties such as ours accessible to the public.



Rolled joint in gold foil paper.

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“But also, I kind of like seeing the creative aspect of working without a net,” Waters says. “And seeing a chef just try things and get a sense of what works, where the flavour bridges are, and make it work from that. Six months from now it will be really cool to see where this progresses to – because this is just the start.”

High dining for dummies: Tips for infused cooking at home

The first rule of attending an infused meal: Don’t arrive starving because you’ll likely overeat. These other tips will ensure an enjoyable elevated experience.

START EARLY

Because the effect of cannabis-infused edibles is gradual and cumulative, high dining is ideal for midday – and should be leisurely. If cannabis dining were ever legalized for a restaurant setting, chef Craig Harding suggests a minimum 2.5-hour seating would be appropriate.

GO LOW

As a guideline in a series of condiments to complement a main dish, use no more than 5 milligrams of THC or CBD in total. Do the math and be vigilant.

GO SLOW

Allow time between courses for effect.

DRINK RESPONSIBLY

Keep liquor and wine to a minimum, if you have any at all. No more than 1 ounce of spirits a cocktail and a glass of wine for the main dish.

OIL HAVE WHAT SHE'S HAVING

Infused oils can turn anything into a cannabis meal, especially when it's a light neutral olive oil.

FAKE IT

Not every course has to feature active cannabis. Showcase a strain's fragrant and flavourful aspects through other ways. At this meal, a cloche dome over a fish dish released a cloud of applewood and Mango Haze smoke with a flourish upon serving. Unlike the dollops of labneh and muhamara side dishes, the cloud had no psychoactive THC; similarly, the finely ground keef dusted on the Pineapple Tea rum cocktail was strictly decorative garnish.

Cannabis Vodka Sour Hack



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Similar to any consummate chef with a new toy, chef Craig Harding of Constantine turned his kitchen into a lab for a couple weeks to play with infused cooking. He experimented with the texture, flavour, smoking and infusions of several Color Cannabis strains to devise our festive menu, as well as bought ready-made oils from the Ontario Cannabis Store (OCS) and even hired a pro to teach him correct oven decarboxylation methods. But the chef's own discovery was his hack for infusing vodka using the iSi gun, which is a professional whipping canister and a thermal circulator. "It creates a more pressurized environment, speeds up the infusion and

the transfer of molecules,” he says.

The cannabis vodka sour cocktail was so good that we insisted on a post-prandial tutorial. It's not predictable in terms of giving you an accurate measure of dose for each serving, but for cannabis entertaining, this experimentation is part of the appeal for any talented amateur home cook whose interest and skill level is somewhere between sous-vide and molecular gastronomy.

In a pressurized iSi canister, Harding infused a half-bottle of vodka with a half-quarter cannabis dried flower using two of the nitrogen dioxide cartridges, then put the iSi in a temperature-controlled water bath at 85 F for an hour. Afterwards he chilled it down in an ice bath for one to two hours. Then, slowly, he let all the chargers and gas out, opened it and strained off the cannabis. “You’re left with beautiful infused vodka,” he says.

“When I see this and smell this and taste this, I have hope for the industry, that it’s not just gonna be cannabis White Claw coolers, that there might be somebody doing something with substance to it from a flavour perspective,” Harding says of the resulting “wet, hoppy, funky” vodka.

iSi stainless-steel dessert whip, \$89.99 at Hudson’s Bay (thebay.com).

Kitchen essentials

If you’re looking to pot up your pantry, start with these accessories:

- Infusing olive or cooking oil, or a drink, is made easier with the use of a dropper, which can help ensure measured additions of cannabis doses. Dropper bitters bottle (1 oz), \$3.99 at Cocktail Emporium (cocktailemporium.com).
- Whether you’re after olive oil with rosemary or butter with CDB, the Levo makes the herbal infusion process simple and mess free with dishwasher-safe components. Levo, \$199.99 through levooil.com.
- If you want to leave the infusing up to the professionals, 70-per-cent Dominican-sourced dark chocolate with 10 milligrams THC (5 mg a piece) will be a welcome addition to any menu. Bean and Bud Dominican Craft Reserve, \$11.99 at legal cannabis dispensaries starting in January 2020 (tweed.com).
- The ultimate party favour for some and well suited for New Year’s Eve, this ready-to-fill cone is composed of slow-burning hemp paper coated in 24-karat-gold foil. Shine pre-rolled cone, \$19.95 at Friendly Stranger (friendlystranger.com).

Infused recipes

By Craig Harding, executive chef and culinary director, Constantine

MUHAMARRA

Ingredients

- 1 litre roasted red peppers, seeds removed
- ½ cup olive oil
- 2 cups walnuts, toasted



- 3 tablespoons garlic
- ½ cup + 2 tablespoons tomato paste
- 1 cup breadcrumbs
- 1/3 cup pomegranate molasses
- 4 tablespoons Aleppo pepper or other mild chili such as Korean pepper
- ½ cup sugar
- 4 tablespoons sumac
- 3 tablespoons lemon juice
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Optional: 15 mg hybrid CDB/THC oil



Infusing the muhamarra with hybrid CDB/THC oil.
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Combine all ingredients in a food processor until very smooth.

PINEAPPLE TEA COCKTAIL

Ingredients (Serves 1)

- 3 ounces strong black tea
- 1 ounce pineapple juice
- 3/4 ounce dark rum
- 1/2 ounce simple syrup
- Optional: Mango Haze flower (or cannabis strain of your choice)

Shake and top with soda and grated nutmeg garnish.

If you want to infuse the drink, sprinkle Mango Haze on top through a bar strainer.



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MOROCCAN BRAISED CORNISH HEN



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Ingredients (Serves 6)

- 4 Cornish hens
- ¼ cup olive oil
- ½ Spanish onion, chopped into large pieces
- 1 carrot, chopped into large pieces
- 1 stalk celery, chopped into large pieces
- 4 cloves of garlic, pressed and chopped
- 2 tablespoons of all-purpose flour
- 1 tablespoon tomato paste
- 4 sprigs of thyme
- 2 bay leaves
- 1 teaspoon ground coriander seed
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1 teaspoon fennel seed
- 1/2 teaspoon turmeric
- 1 teaspoon ground ginger
- ½ cinnamon stick
- 2 tablespoons pomegranate molasses
- 2 cups red wine
- 2 litres chicken stock
- ½ cup dried apricots
- ½ cup green olives
- 2 tablespoons preserved lemon
- Salt and pepper to taste

Debone the hens and separate the breasts from the legs. Remove the wing tip.

Season lightly with salt and pepper and brown with olive oil in a heavy-bottom pot.

Remove hens and brown mirepoix (make sure to leave the veg in large pieces as they will be removed after braising).

Once the veg is softened add the flour, tomato paste and touch more olive oil and cook for 2 minutes.

Add all dry and fresh spices and pomegranate molasses and cook through for another 2 minutes.

Deglaze with wine and make sure to get all the brown bits off the bottom of the pot.

Add the chicken stock, apricots, olives, preserved lemon and hen back into the stock and adjust seasoning with a pinch more salt.

Place the lid on and simmer on low for 20-30 min. Once the breasts are just cooked through remove and set aside. The goal here is to prevent them from drying out.

Once the legs have cooked for another 30 min remove and set aside. Remove the mirepoix.

Turn the heat up on the stove and reduce braising liquid to desired thickness. Make sure to place the hen back inside the sauce to cool off. They will reabsorb liquid and stay nice and juicy.

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